

[By Gina Bullard](#)

Bill Rowell knows the perils of being a Vermont dairy farmer.

"It's not all that I know, but it's what I like," Rowell said.

The future of his farm in Sheldon, along with countless others around the U.S., is up in the air with the five-year \$500 billion farm bill stalling before Congress.

"The speaker's office is saying we will not take it up for debate. That's wrong. We have a job to do. The fact that it's a difficult job isn't an excuse for Congress not to do its job," said Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vermont.

Welch and his House Agriculture Committee passed a new farm bill earlier this month, but Republican Speaker John Boehner won't let it hit the House floor, fearing the expensive bill will divide his party in an election year. Instead, the speaker wants to move ahead with a one-year extension plus disaster aid for over two-thirds of the country's farmers experiencing severe drought.

"It's unacceptable and that's it," Rowell said.

Opponents say the one-year extension would mean no safety net for farmers because it doesn't

look far enough into the future.

"We need a farm bill; farmers need consistency. This is a five-year bill. They should have a five-year bill," said Rep. Bill Owens, D-N.Y.

The MILC program is funded by the farm bill. It pays small and midsize dairy farmers cash when prices drop. By design, that funding decreases in August. If the extension passes the funding would stay at that reduced level.

"The MILC program that would be extended would collapse and have no value to Vermont farmers, even though we are anticipating higher feed costs," Welch said.

"It's kind of hard to look at them when they stall like this and have any endearment towards them or their process," Rowell said.

Advocates for the 2012 five-year farm bill also point out that taxes are reduced in the new bill, but not in the one-year extension. The extension would continue funding for all federal farm and food stamp programs through September 2013, but decrease spending on direct farm subsidies. That money would go to farmers out west who are battling a record drought.